

We're all in this together – aren't we?

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As previously [reported](#), the NHS spent around £29M on hospital chaplains in 2009/2010. The National Secular Society argues that churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples should fund these chaplains off their own bats and I couldn't agree more, especially in times of austerity because as we keep hearing - we are all in this together. Aren't we?

I work very closely with campaign groups who are determined to stop and roll back the privatisation and 'profitisation' of the NHS. Since the Government introduced its Health and Social Care Bill (now 'Act'), many people have been fighting hard for the ideal of universal healthcare and to ensure that the poorest people in our country cannot be left to suffer or die for lack of money – this is morally reprehensible. You would think therefore that the guardians of morality, compassion, and charity would be jumping and down volunteering to help. They're not.

The NHS provides the most important service in this country, and the most compassionate. It asks no questions, makes no judgments, but provides excellent world-class medical care to anyone who needs it, when they need it. It is the jewel in the crown of the British public sector. I spent many years working in the NHS and I saw definite room for improvement (as anywhere,) but it is a well-oiled and economically sound system, and it desperately needs protecting. If you want to understand why, you only need to look to the United States where the dollar dictates care and millions of Americans go without – many die in the world's richest country because the insurance companies they pay their premiums to have found ways not to cough up. In fact, some American doctors are paid bonuses if they can invent new and ingenious ways not to treat the sick. We are facing this in Britain as healthcare costs soar and the private sector rides in pretending to be the solution while ensuring that it is profit, not care, which is the primary concern of NHS practitioners.

While universal healthcare edges closer to oblivion, there is a more immediate problem - the £20bn in savings the NHS has been told to make since the Coalition came to power. The [Guardian reported](#) in October last year that the effect of these savings is hitting patients hard and fast and some services have been forced to close. Many patients have to go without painkillers (yes, painkillers) and hospitals are sinking further and further in to debt. But still they must find £29M a year to pay for hospital chaplains to visit and comfort the sick.

To clarify; the cash-strapped NHS is paying chaplains – predominantly from the Church of England – to bring comfort to the sick and dying in hospital.

It is rumoured that the value of the assets of the Church of England is around the £6bn mark. Add to this its annual intake of around £750M and you've got a fairly well-funded organisation. They can probably spare a few quid (£29M or thereabouts) to care for the sick and the dying. I have no doubt whatsoever that the Church of England does a lot of good, but we need them to help in the delivery of healthcare and given their supposed ethos of charity and compassion, I do not see why they can't find the money to fund their own chaplains. We shouldn't even have to ask them, they should insist upon it. Meanwhile, a certain Archbishop of Canterbury must decide which of his two palaces to sleep in at night (after long day promoting sharia, an Archbishop needs a good rest).

Lambeth Palace, the Archbishop's main residence, is an ancient castle on the south of the river Thames and costs around £650,000 every year to run. Other bishops don't have it too shabbily

either – senior clergy are living in luxury. This happens across the religions – anyone who has ever been to the Vatican might suspect that Il Papa does not have the famous words about camels fitting through eyes of needles faster than rich people getting in to heaven, at the forefront of his mind.

In this age of austerity, it seems to me that the only people "in it together" are the poor, while the rich are somewhere else. I don't think the Church of England can realistically throw around millions on a whim and I certainly support the right of sick people to seek comfort from their religion, but what I struggle to understand is why the Church of England, and others, are not falling over themselves to help the NHS provide its hugely important and compassionate services. In other words, why are they not "in it" with the NHS? I am not asking for the keys to the safe, but the very least it could do is pay for its own chaplains.

On a final note, if you're thinking £29M is just a drop in the ocean, think again; it would pay for 1,000 nurses. That's 1,000 nurses not on the dole, 1,000 families not destroyed by unemployment, and a 1,000 extra vital staff for this precious institution.

Its high-time that the rich religions started putting their money where their mouths are and cut back on their own riches to help the poor – especially in difficult economic times. It is, after all, the reason they say they exist.

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